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ABSTRACT

Myths and stereotypes about Asians that are perpetuated by the media are listed and briefly described in this booklet. The Asian image in children's textbooks is also described. Significant dates in Asian American history are included along with a brief bibliography of books, magazines, booklets and audio-visual materials. (Author/AM)

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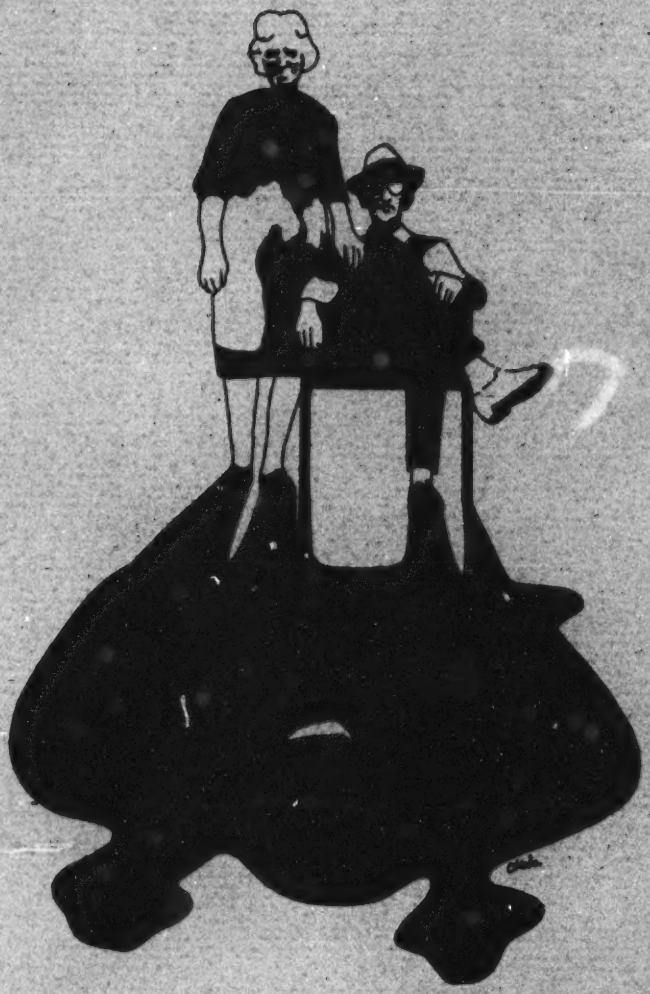

**THE ASIAN IMAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: STEREOTYPES AND REALITIES**

***(Prepared by Asian Americans for Fair Media, 43 West 28th Street, New York, N. Y. 10001, with the assistance of other asian organizations and interested individuals. The handbook is intended as a basic primer for all members of the media).***

## A MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA

Most people are unaware of the history of racism and oppression that Asian people have experienced in America. Discrimination against Asians began in 1848 with the arrival of the first immigrants, the Chinese, and it exists today.

Governmental and educational institutions, advertising and public relations agencies, newspapers and informational organizations have often developed and reinforced stereotypes that perpetuate prejudice against Asians.

The media, for political, economic, social and comic reasons, is responsible for this distortion, which has damaged the image of Asian-Americans.

We, as Asian Americans, protest the imposition of negative stereotypes by the media and we call upon them to correct false impressions that are denigrating to us. We ask that media establish a continuous dialogue with us to incorporate the Asian American perspective in material content.



1978

## THE ASIAN IMAGE IN CHILDREN'S TEXTBOOKS

The contact that the average American child has with Asian Americans by the time he or she enters school is little (or, if one considers it contact, in restaurants and laundries.) Furthermore, Asian Americans are considered "foreigners." The child's parents are generally unaware of the image of Blacks, much less that of Asians.

Children often go to school with degrading concepts of slanted eyes, "Chinamen" songs, or an image of the Asian as one who can surmount all obstacles with a flick of a hand or a kick of a foot. The image of Asians as small, wily, skillful or crafty is detrimental to children whose attitudes are formed at an early age.

Nor do secondary schools do anything to counteract stereotypes formed in childhood. Unless teachers take the time and initiative to present a program on, for instance, "Chinese in New York City," "Asians As a Labor Force in the United States," or "Japanese-Americans during World War II," there is a gap in the child's learning process.

In the social studies curriculum guides published by the New York City Board of Education for grades 1 through 8, very little reference is made to Asian Americans despite the rapidly growing Asian, particularly Chinese, population in the city.

In the Grade 1 guide, "Living and Working Together in the Community," only one book is listed in the section, "Communities Observe Special Days," and that was written by a Caucasian.

In the Grade 2 guide, "How People Live in City Communities Around the World," there is but a small reference made to a Chinatown protest for police protection under "Public Opinion." In the section entitled "Eat your Way Around New York City," chow mein and plain boiled rice are listed.

In the Grade 4 guide, "American People and Leaders," there are many subheadings where references to Asian Americans could be made, such as "How People Developed Our Nation," "Transportation," "How People From Many Lands Built Our Democracy" and "How Immigrants Contributed to Our Culture." Pearl Buck's book, "Welcome Child," is the only book listed in the bibliography that deals with Asians.

"Asia" is a subheading in the Grade 5 guide and "China" is a section in the Grade 6 guide, but current material on Americans of Asian background is lacking.

However, curriculum guides are far from enough. What is needed are more accurate and relevant books. But the Board of Education of the City of New York is not fulfilling its responsibility. In September, 1973, the card catalogue of the Professional Library at the Board of Education listed only four books under China, all written by Caucasians. The most recent book was published in 1953. There was nothing on Chinese immigration to the United States or Chinese Americans.

Asians have had a small but definite role in the building of a wealthy America and should be given credit as such. They should not be portrayed as people who live a quaint life in the faraway lands.

A child enters school not only with what he or she has learned from the parents, but with what has been taught to the parents through myths and stereotypes perpetuated by the mass media.

**Slant Eyes, Buck Teeth, Yellow Skin Caricatures of Asians**

Distorted portrayals of racial and cultural characteristics demean ethnic groups. Such exaggerations can induce a perverted sense of superiority among those who are not so characterized. Ethnocentric "humor" is derisive, insensitive and resented by groups made the butt of such offensive "jokes."

**Japs, Chinks, Gooks, Etc. Are Derogatory Terms Used Against Asians**

These terms evolved historically for the express purpose of instigating antagonism and hatred during wartime hysteria and for economic and political expediency. Perpetuation of these terms further intensifies the devisiveness between people today.

**"Rots of Ruck," "Flied Lice," "So Sollee," Etc. Are Used As Humorous Expressions**

Asian languages have phonetic sounds that have no suitable equivalent in English. Likewise English has sounds like "r" and "th" that are absent in some Asian languages. Therefore, an American trying to speak Japanese or Chinese often creates the same type of unintentional humor as an Asian trying to speak English. What sounds like humor to one can be insulting to another.

**Books, Magazines, Newspapers, Movies, T.V., and Comic Books Often Characterize Asians As Sneaky, Inscrutable, Cunning**

This kind of damaging and vicious stereotyping was based on ignorance. Its seed was planted by the superficial accounts of American missionaries and traders who, through their own ignorance, were unable to understand the divergent philosophy and life style of the East.

For commercial purposes, the media continue to reinforce and perpetuate these distorted views.

**Made in America Characters Such As Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, Etc. Perpetuate Stereotypes**

These gross characters are fabrications of the Western mind, created for the purpose of selling products and movies. They are far removed from real Asians.

Fu Manchu novels by Sax Rohmer first appeared in 1911 and were serialized in Collier's magazine in 1957. Fu Manchu was a radio show in the thirties. Charlie Chan was introduced by Hollywood scriptwriters in the 1930's. (See "A Look at the Caricatures of the Asians as Sketched by American Movies," by Irvin Paik in *Roots: An Asian American Reader*, pp. 30-33).

**Non-Asians Continue to Portray Asian Roles in American Stage and Screen**

As a consequence, non-Asians often misrepresent the Asian character or role. They are perpetrating stereotypes. Not only is this demeaning to Asian-Americans but it gives a distorted image to young Asian Americans who are becoming conscious of their own identity and heritage.

Lack of experience and training are given as reasons for the non-hiring of Asian actors and actresses. Access to opportunities for gaining that experience and training are denied the Asians, thus creating a never-ending cycle.

**Media Portray Asian Women As Being Docile, Submissive, Sexless Or As Being Exotic, Sexy and Diabolical**

This describes the Asian woman as an object or a commodity and not as a person with ideas, aspirations, talents and feelings. Asian women as well as other Third World women want the

respect and dignity that are denied them.

Because many Westerners have only a superficial knowledge of ethnic groups, cultural differences of these groups are emphasized; they are viewed not as human beings but merely as possessors of exotic qualities. Differences are exaggerated or distorted and myths are hence created: "Dragon Lady" and "Suzie Wong" exist only in the American imagination. )See Irving Paik article in *Roots: An Asian American Reader.*)

"Here in Washington we have an agency that imports Korean women that has told clients not to worry about how hard they work these women because Korean women are very docile." This statement implies they are nonhuman—unfeeling and unthinking. )Quoted from "Imported Domestics", *New York Post* November 3, 1973, page 25).

**Asian Lives Are Worthless and Expendable in the Minds of Many Americans**

"The difference between us and them is our firmer belief in the sacredness of life — they're willing to die readily, as all orientals are...I wouldn't trade one dead American for 50 dead Chinamen." So spoke an American retired Army general during the Korean War — expressing the thinking of a vast majority of non-Asians in the United States.

The massacres and atrocities in Vietnam committed by Americans were simply an extension of this kind of racist mentality. As early as the 1800's European powers tried to carve China into spheres of influence, and millions of Chinese who resisted were slaughtered during various wars and uprisings. In 1945 atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Napalm was used in the Korean and Indo-Chinese Wars. In the United States 110,000 Japanese-Americans were placed in concentration camps during

World War II.

**Asian Americans Are Often Asked – "Where Do You Come From?" "How Long Have You Been Here?" and Told 'You Speak Pretty Good English.'**

Most Americans assume that Asian Americans are foreign born. This denies the history and the contribution made by Asians in the United States. Textbooks provide little information on Asian American contributions and that which is available is often distorted. Asians played an integral role in the taming of the West, the construction of the transcontinental railway, and the reclaiming of valuable farm lands in California. Like the Blacks upon whose shoulders the South was built, so, too, must the Asians be credited for how the West was won.

**Media Often Portray Chinese As Laundrymen, Japanese As Gardeners, Pilipinos As Houseboys**

Early Asian immigrants were forced into menial occupations in order to survive. For example, the Chinese entered the laundry business in California because they were largely denied access to the gold mines. The only jobs available to the Chinese were cooking and doing laundry for the miners. Similarly, the Japanese immigrants found all occupations closed to them except domestic work or farming. Asians are no longer confined to such occupations, but the media continue to portray them in these lowly jobs.

**Most Americans Assume Asians Have No Social Problems**

This assumption deprives Asian Americans an equal opportunity to get needed funds available to minority groups. Asians in America have been forced to form self-help organizations in their own communities for survival and protection. Hence, the misconception is formed that Asians "take

care of their own." Until recently, Asians have been grouped into an "others category because they are statistically a small group. This picture is inaccurate. Some realities are:

*San Francisco Chinatown:* 67% of housing is substandard. Average education is 1.7% years against 12 years for rest of city. Unemployment rate is 12.8%, much higher than the national average. (Figures are for 1960. Sources: *Roots: an Asian American Reader.*)

*New York City Chinatown:* Overcrowding is more than 30% higher than the nation as a whole. As of spring 1969, 67% of housing was substandard as compared to 34% for the city's non-white occupied housing units labeled substandard. Total proportion of the population which did not complete high school is 67%. (Source: 1969 Chinatown Report)

Furthermore, the existence of "Chinatowns" and "Little Tokyos" are in part products of a racist society.

**Asians Are Held Responsible for the Heroin Traffic in the U.S.A.**

During the Opium Wars of the 1800's, Europeans, rather than Asians, manipulated the lucrative opium trade in China and battled for its domination. Even today Western powers continue to control and profit from the drug traffic. A large portion of the world's heroin comes from the "Golden Triangle" in Southeast Asia. Recent evidence indicates this lucrative traffic flourishes with the tacit approval of the C.I.A. (See "Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," by Alfred W. McCoy).

**Asians Are Viewed As Hard-Working, Uncomplaining, and Accepting of Lower Wages**

Historically the Chinese (who are the first Asian immigrant group to enter the United States) and the other Asians who followed were forced to accept cheap wages and endure abominable conditions and exploitation in order to survive.

Even today Asian immigrants are forced to take menial jobs, such as working in the sweatshops in New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The unions have done little to fight against job discrimination for these immigrants. Instead of urging recent immigrants to join the unions, which strengthens the bargaining power of labor, bigoted labor leaders such as Dennis Kearney and Samuel Gompers maliciously kept Asian Americans out of the unions. This resurrected the image of "cheap labor." Instead of trying to build unity among the laboring people of America, these labor leaders have fostered racial bigotry by pitting white workers against Asian American laborers with hints of "Asian hordes" and "cheap labor." (See "Anti-Oriental Agitation and The Rise of Working Class Racism" by Herbert Hill, *Society* magazine, Jan/Feb. 1973).

This kind of discrimination still exists. The influx of immigrants to Chinatown in recent years have caused hundreds of sweatshops (over 200 in New York City and 150 in San Francisco) to fester in our cities, paying workers illegal, substandard wages in unfit working conditions. City and union officials turn their backs to the plight of poverty-stricken Asians who live in overcrowded tenements and work in illegal sweatshops. Optimistic forecasts on the status of Asian Americans in the United States are a small consolation to immigrants who are forced to work for slave wages. If Asians have achieved a certain measure of equality in this country, it is only because they have overcome massive racial discrimination and prejudice.

**"Yellow Peril" — Where Did This Term Originate?**

The cry of "yellow peril" was

raised in the early 1900's by California journalists — notably William Randolph Hearst — when Japanese American farmers, after years of back-breaking labor on submarginal lands, began to achieve remarkable success and thus became economically competitive.

**Why Are Asians Used As Scapegoats?**

During periods of economic and/or political crises, all the stereotypes mentioned above are used by vested interests to make scapegoats of Asians in order to divert attention from the real problem. The history of Hawaii and California — where Asians first emigrated — is filled with examples of these stereotypes to pit workers against Asian people.

A blatant example of scapegoating occurred in 1906 when a furor was purposely created about excluding Japanese children from San Francisco schools to detract public attention from a major scandal involving the city's mayor, who was a political boss. (He was subsequently convicted of bribery).

The list is inexhaustible. But it is ample warrant for our demand that the media must become more sensitive to the needs of Asian Americans and all ethnic and minority groups.

We urge you to create representative community review boards to counsel, to monitor questionable advertising, program and material content. Also we urge you to hire Asian Americans in all levels of media, including training programs and decision-making positions.

We hope the handbook has heightened your consciousness concerning the plight of Asians in America. This is a call to end divisions caused by racism and oppression. The replacement of degrading racial stereotypes by realistic images is necessary to the preservation of our dignity as human beings.

## SIGNIFICANT DATES IN ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

The history of Asians in America is not a pretty one. It is a history written in the blood of countless race riots and the sweat of the railroad workers. Clearly, the most serious acts of discrimination took place during times of significant economic crisis or political scandal, showing Asian Americans as scapegoats for the Establishment. (The following dates were compiled by Philip Kyung Sik Park, in *Trends* magazine, March/April 1973.)

### *CHINESE*

1848-52 Chinese, fleeing the chaos of the Taiping Rebellion, arrive in time to serve as indentured servants during the California gold rush.

1856 Passage of Foreign Miner's Tax to prevent Chinese from panning for gold.

1859 Exclusion of Chinese from public schools in San Francisco.

1870 Naturalization Act excludes Chinese from citizenship and forbids the entry of wives of these laborers.

1871 Anti-Chinese riots in which white mobs burned and looted for several weeks with little interference from law enforcement agencies.
- 1878—Truckee, Cal.
- 1880—Denver, Colo.
- 1885—Tacoma, Wash. (every home and business burned to the ground)
- 1885—Seattle, Wash.
- 1885—Rock Springs, Wyo. (28 murdered)
- 1885—Gold Hill; Virginia City, Nevada

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act "suspends" immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years.

1892 Geary Act prohibits Chinese immigration for another 10 years and denies bail for writ of habeas corpus.

1902 Congress "indefinitely extends the prohibition against Chinese immigration and the denial of naturalization."

1943 Repeal of Chinese Exclusion Act.

### *JAPANESE*

1868 Japanese contract laborers arrive in Hawaii.

1883 Japanese replaces Chinese as source of cheap labor after Chinese Exclusion Act.

1905 Japanese children in California ordered to attend segregated schools.

1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement" restricts Japanese immigration.

1925-52 Exclusion of Japanese immigration all together.

1942-45 Executive Order 9066 puts 110,000 Japanese (primarily citizens) in ten concentration camps. Millions of dollars lost in property and possession.

### *KOREANS*

1903 Korean contract laborers arrive in Hawaii. In 1904 movement to the mainland began.

1906 San Francisco school board passes resolution whereby principals send all Korean, Chinese, and Japanese children to Oriental Public School on south side of Clay Street. This touched off a revolt by parents.

1913 Eleven Korean apricot pickers were driven out of Hemet, Calif. (near Riverside).

1939 Koreans picket in Los Angeles against the United States scrap iron and airplane fuel shipment to Japan. Longshoremen Union honored the picket line and stopped work half day. This was the first public demonstration against Japan's invasion of China in

the U.S.

*PILIPINOS*

1906 Beginnings of Pilipino farm labor in Hawaii.

1925 Legislative Act made Pilipinos ineligible for U.S. citizenship unless they served three years in the U.S. Navy.

1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act gave the Philippine Islands independence and a U.S. immigration quota of 50 persons per year.

*ALL ASIANS*

1906 California's antimiscegenation law amended to bar marriage between white and "Mongolian."

1910 United States Supreme Court upheld the 1870 Naturalization Act's being extended to other Asians.

1913, 1920 California Alien Land Act prevents Asians from purchasing land.

1924 Exclusionary Immigration Act completely ends Asian immigration, except for the Pilipinos who are "subjects of United States."

1948 California's antimiscegenation laws repealed.

1950 McCarran-Walter Act conferred the right of naturalization on Asians not born in the United States and set a quota of 100 immigrants per year for Asian countries.

1965 National Origins Act raises Asian immigration quota to 20,000 per year for Asian countries — the same as for European countries — thereby causing tremendous strains in the Chinese ghetto.

1967 Antimiscegenation laws ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

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The first national journal devoted to a critical examination of the experience of Asians in America.

*Asian Women's Journal*, Asian Women's Coalition at Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

A collection of articles, literary pieces, photos, art, and bibliography on the experiences of Asian women by Asian women.

*Bridge: The Magazine About Asians in America*, The Basement Workshop, Inc., 22 Catherine St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

A bimonthly magazine coming out of New York's Chinatown, it includes fiction, poems, art, interviews with elderly immigrants about their early life in this country, and articles about various Asian-American communities.

*East/West: The Chinese American Journal*, 758 Commercial St., San Francisco, Calif. 94108.

A weekly bilingual paper with a mixture of news articles, social events, and commentaries.

*Getting Together*, P. O. Box 26229, San Francisco, Calif. 94126.

A bilingual newspaper of the I Wor Kuen organization in New York and San Francisco. Covers national and international news affecting Asian Americans.

*Gidra*, Box 18046, Los Angeles, Calif. 90018.

The most widely circulated Asian-American newspaper/magazine in the country.

*Kalayaan International*, Philippine Internation Community News Service, P.O. Box 2919, San Francisco, Calif. 94126.

Monthly newspaper from San Francisco dealing with news of the Pilipino community and issues affecting the Pilipino movement.

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*Prejudice in America: The Japanese Americans*. 4 filmstrips, 2 cassettes, teacher's manual, and reading list for students and teachers. $33.90. Write Japanese American Curriculum Project. For grades 7-12 & college.

*Asian Americans* by Toge Fujihira. An 18 minutes color filmstrip, probes the past and current sufferings of Asian American descendants through historic photographs, cartoons and sketches, and interviews. $7.50. Write to: United Methodist Church Service Center, 7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 47237.

**STATEMENTS AGAINST RACISM, CALLING ON THE MASS MEDIA FOR GREATER SENSITIVITY FOR THE FEELINGS OF ALL ASIAN AMERICANS AND PEOPLES OF COLOR**

"A great need exists for more attention to the legitimate aspirations of Asian Americans to be thought of and respected as truly equal. ...those involved in the dissemination of information and opinion, have a major responsibility to help spread the truth about this little-known minority."

*—Patsy T. Mink, Member of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

"...'yellow journalism.' Its historical connection with the shabby and brutal treatment of Asians in America is not only obvious but should make it quite unnecessary for contemporary Asian Americans to remind the media and the institutions which support it that their distorted images of peoples of color constitute an indelible scar on the American body politic.

"The need is great for a more humane and balanced depiction of Asian-Americans in every aspect of the American media."

*Benjamin F. Payton, Officer in Charge,*
*Higher Education and Minority Affairs, The Ford Foundation*

"...causing a good deal of public concern is the lack of sensitivity sometimes exhibited by broadcasting to the dignity of human beings, especially women, the poor, the powerless, and those who are not of the white race.

"There are dignified and humane ways to deal with people, and there are undignified and inhumane ways. Many advertisers and broadcasters do not see a clear distinction between the two."

*—Everett C. Parker, Director*
*Office of Communication, United Church of Christ*

"The use of racial stereotypes must be understood as not merely an expression of sick and bigoted minds, but rather as part of an elaborate series of justifications for the systematic exploitation and oppression of non-Caucasian peoples. ...it is part of the attempt to maintain all the grotesque notions of white supremacy and to perpetuate the social patterns of a racist society. ...it must be fought against whenever and wherever it appears."

*—Herbert Hill, National Labor Director*
*National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*

"The YWCA of the U.S.A. in its 26th National Convention reaffirmed its *One Imperative:* to thrust our collective power to eliminate racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary."

*—Dorothy I. Height, Director,*
*Center for Racial Justice, Young Women's Christian Association*

"The idea of full equality, a key civil liberties principle, is offended by the practice of racial stereotyping. The use of such stereotyping by media makes certain groups within society seem less equal and to this extent harms efforts to eliminate racial discrimination and prejudice."

*—Alan Reitman, Associate Director*
*American Civil Liberties Union*